

How We Helped Ho Chi Minh

By HILAIRE DU BERRIER

The war in Indo-China today is no accident. Plans were laid in China in 1941; stepped up by American aid which went for arming the "agrarian reformers."

In ages past, natives shunned the jungles along the Seam Rap River of Indo-China. Phantom armies, they said, swept ceaselessly through the forest led by weeping queens on shadowy elephants.

Today armies are there but they are not phantoms of the vanished empire of the Khmers. Crack divisions composed of some 120,000 men of Ho Chi Minh's Red rebels have cut Indo-China in two and are bleeding France white in both men and money—one-fourth of her officer cadre and more money than France has received in Marshall Plan aid in the disheartening years since World War Two theoretically closed its ledgers. Aid to France has thus been more than nullified by the lone struggle in Indo-China.

But there *are* ghosts in Indo-China—the same sort of ghosts that haunt the record of America's part in the fall of the Chinese mainland. For in Indo-China, too, the background of the Communists' rise to power follows a grimly familiar pattern: an American-fostered propaganda line that the Communists were agrarian reformers; that their leader Ho Chi Minh was a "good man" despite his Moscow training; that forces opposing the Communists were reactionary and not to be listened to.

Moreover, in Indo-China, American aid initially armed the very troops the French are fighting today. Thus, in the horrible topsy-turvy of diplomatic blunders we find ourselves paying 80 per cent of the war cost in Indo-China to combat a foe we actually encouraged with our help.

A Lulling Tune

The Institute of Pacific Relations was given a full report on Indo-China as far back as July 1950. It was, in effect, a Wedemeyer-like report, detailing the Communist build-up and pointing to future aggressions. The report was rejected in its entirety.

Instead, I.P.R. and the American public listened to a more lulling tune. The pace of the "line" on Indo-China was set in *Harper's Magazine* in a series of articles by Harold R. Isaacs. These articles, in turn, were the by-product of a reporting trip Isaacs had just completed for *Newsweek*, to which he was then contributing as an authority on the Far East. Isaacs' line was simple and to the point—the Communist point: Ho Chi Minh was a

patriot, fighting the evil colonialism of the French. Isaacs' view aroused a number of readers.

Ho, the man Isaacs defended as a sort of local saint, was educated in the Soviet's Orient University and then, in 1925, sent to Canton as an assistant to Borodin. In 1931 the British discovered that he was head of the Southeast Asia Bureau of the Third International, and expelled him from Hong Kong. At the time Isaacs was in Shanghai as a newspaperman certainly in a position to know what was going on. Yet, in the *Harper's* articles he described Ho as a patriot kept alive by "honesty of purpose and absence of illusion."

In 1941 (not 1943 as indicated by U.S. reports of the "tenth anniversary" of Ho's government in December 1953), Ho's Vietminh Front first emerged as a shadow government. It was established, not in Indo-China, but on Chinese soil. The man who planted its seeds was a southern war lord named Chang Fa-kwei. It was his hope actually to take over the rich provinces of Kwangsi, Yunnan, and Kwantung and, eventually, part if not all of Indo-China. Ho, then posing as head of an "exile" government during the Japanese invasion, seemed a perfect foil. Chang Fa-kwei "recognized" Ho. His master plan called for Ho, after American arms had run off the Japanese, to run off the French. Then Chang could run off Ho! The plan benefited only Ho. Chang Fa-kwei is now in Hong Kong, himself an exile from both Formosa and the mainland. Gradually, forces he set in motion encircle him.

Within three years Ho's "government in exile" was given full diplomatic status and established as a going concern in Luchow. Large quantities of American arms, from that moment on, were dumped in Ho's eager hands. He was, of course, supposed to fight the Japanese. There is only one instance on record of any friction between the Vietminh and the Japanese during this period. It was an incident in an isolated village. Eight Japanese were killed.

The Japanese were well aware of what was going on; that Ho would pounce on the French as soon as the Japanese withdrew. So it was to Ho and his American-equipped forces that the Japanese surrendered their arms when they gave up in Northern Indo-China.

After V-J Day American officers arrived in

Saigon, Hanoi, and Haiphong. A pair of them assigned to investigate the situation in Indo-China got in touch with the French "underground" officer who had written the report on which they were acting. The officer was in rags. He had no facilities to entertain them. He had, after all, just been through a war. So had Ho's men, but, unlike the French, they had not suffered. Within twenty-four hours the American officers were firmly in the hands of a well-primed and sufficiently heeled group of English-speaking Communists and former collaborators who efficiently set about denouncing the French and praising Ho—in direct opposition to the demonstrable facts the French were trying unsuccessfully to get the officers to heed.

"Guides" and "Translators"

The efficiency of these "guides" was increased in ever-widening circles as other American missions lavished their vitamin tablets and K-rations on them, while the French remained relatively impoverished. And, as in China, as soon as the Americans became committed to any part of the line being fed by the "progressive natives," they acquired an unshakable vested interest in all parts of the line. Before long such an officer as Major Robert Buckley of the OSS wrote off all French charges against Ho as mere gripes, to be ignored. George Sheldon, a bitterly anti-French observer to begin with, worked with OSS in the area, then returned to Saigon as vice-consul. From that vantage he wrote letters, official reports, and articles (for I.P.R.) supporting Ho's cause against the French. Another American officer, while French officers who knew the situation watched amazed and helpless, donated money to Ho and made a stirring speech on his behalf.

To keep this American support going, Ho used a device that had served the Communists well in China. As if by magic pro-Ho translators always appeared to grab jobs with American missions. A bright young man named Li Xuan was an outstanding example.

In his day-by-day work, Li simply told natives that American aid would come because of Ho. And for the Americans he "translated" their replies to any questions as ringing tributes to Ho. What either side in the conversation really said was incidental and unknown. After a while Li acquired G.I. clothes and went off more and more on his own, linking American aid and Ho for the benefit of the impressionable natives. Finally, after "hitch-hiking" to Shanghai aboard an American general's plane, he instigated there a rebellion of Annamite troops against the French. This time he even posed as an American officer to whip up the fury. A full report on his activities was greeted by the thoroughly buffaloes OSS with the comment: "The French are beefing again."

And so Li went merrily on. From the garrison-

rousing he went to Fred Hamson, bureau chief of the Associated Press in Shanghai, and made an arrangement to work as a "stringer" correspondent in Indo-China. Back home he affixed A.P. war correspondent badges to his clothes and, besides filing news to the international wire service, again used a phony American connection to raise Ho's prestige. When Hamson tried to stop him he simply disappeared.

Meantime, the barriers against any factual reports from Indo-China grew. A North Dakota-born OSS employee was summarily dismissed on orders from Washington after warning against Ho. The reason given: that the man was a Canadian!

Back in America things were humming for Ho, too. When a Vietnam-American Friendship Association held a banquet in New York in 1948 (and it must be recalled that Vietnam, today, is antithetical to Ho's Vietminh), the pro-Ho OSS Major Buckley was on hand to provide his learned views. Harold Isaacs was busy, too. After leaving *Newsweek* at about the time of the Alger Hiss trial, he busied himself as a reviewer of books on the Far East for the *New York Herald Tribune*. In April 1950 he turned up as a lecturer at the American Academy of Political and Social Science in Philadelphia. On the same dates the meeting was also addressed by Owen Lattimore. A year later Isaacs denied knowing Lattimore.

American Fears Tied French Hands

With war finally blazing, of course, the direct-support phase of the great Ho Chi Minh hoax was over. Indirection became the only possibility—a situation again comparable to the one in China.

In the fall of 1953, as more and more signs pointed to the building up of the present Red all-out offensive, French officers debated possible counter-measures. The situation was desperate. Public opinion at home was against further sacrifices in a lone fight for an area in which little influence or interest would remain to them if they won it. While they felt they were staving off the communization of southeast Asia alone, portions of the American press continued to oppose such aid as they were receiving with the cry that America was perpetuating colonialism.

Specialists on the Far East, led by a former underground leader in Indo-China, hit on an idea. Commerce in the Associated States of Indo-China is largely in the hands of Chinese merchants. It was their war also. A Chinese general of sufficient stature to command a following in the border provinces of Yunnan, Kwangsi, and Kwangtung was enlisted to form an anti-Red Chinese volunteer army, take over a sector of the front, and start hacking his way toward Red China. In return for arms and support he pledged a guerrilla movement within these provinces that would cut Chinese aid from Ho Chi Minh and even harry the Vietminh

rear. With Ho's defeat, the Chinese might gather momentum and roll into Red China. Again American fears of bringing Mao Tse-tung openly into the struggle tied French hands. As in North Korea in the case of General MacArthur, we committed the French to a struggle without victory.

In Paris a rumor spread at the beginning of this year that the fighting would cease with a direct deal between Washington and Moscow. Whether the idea was inspired by the Communists to bring about French inertia while their own plans for reinforcement proceeded, or whether the forthcoming Geneva conference is a step toward that end, it is still too early to say.

Letter from Paris

Bidault's Mistake

By R. G. WALDECK

Only a few weeks ago American diplomats in Europe believed that the Berlin Conference had convinced the French that no solution for Europe was to be expected from talking with the Russians, and that speedy ratification of EDC was the only alternative. But it came out quite differently. Optimistic observers here note that the conference had no effect on the French attitude on EDC one way or the other. Pessimistic ones insist that resistance to ratification has stiffened since the conference. My own observations gibe with those of the pessimists.

This much is certain: the efforts made by Washington and Bonn to get the French to ratify EDC before the Geneva Conference have failed. The Parliament feels that there is no use in beginning the debate on EDC before the Saar question is settled and close association between the United States, Britain, and EDC countries is guaranteed.

As for the Saar question, it looked for a moment as though a settlement was within reach. Dr. Adenauer, in his eagerness to bring off EDC, "offered up the Saar to Europeanization in a non-existent Europe," as one sharp-penned German journalist put it. However, the French suddenly raised the ante, and talks have been suspended.

Bidault, it is said, wishes to use ratification as a trump card in Geneva. Premier Laniel, who has been in power for nine months, wants to beat the record of M. Queuille, who stayed in power for a whole year—but the debate over EDC, he fears, might spoil it all. Also dampening to the government's enthusiasm is the growing suspicion that only a socialist government, headed by Europe-minded Socialist Guy Mollet, can bring about a vote for ratification.

It will be, at best, a hard fight. For the French feel more strongly than they did a year or so ago that EDC constitutes a long-term adventure of the

first magnitude. Still, in the end, France is likely to ratify EDC as being the lesser evil. At least that's what the public opinion polls indicate and what most friends of the West hope for. "Just let them end the war in Indo-China," they say, "and the ratification of EDC will go through like a breeze."

But will the Geneva Conference end the war? While in the United States the conference is condemned as a "concession" to the French which might result in a Far Eastern Munich, the French, too, have their misgivings about the conference. In fact, with the exception of M. Bidault and his friends inside and outside of the Cabinet, almost everyone seems to fear that nothing good can result from it. Also, a heated debate is raging both publicly and privately as to whether or not it was clever of Bidault to insist on this new confrontation with the Reds.

Bidault, it is well known, founds his hopes for Geneva on the apparent alacrity with which Molotov in Berlin jumped at the chance of a conference on Asia; and on reports that Mao does not get on with Malenkov, is sorely in need of economic aid such as only the West can furnish, and is eager to play his part in the concert of nations. Thus Bidault believes that Mao would be ready to stop aid to the Vietminh in exchange for admission to the U.N. and economic concessions. But, even assuming that Bidault knows the score, politically minded Frenchmen realize that only the United States can furnish what Mao covets. And they think it unlikely that the United States will abandon her resistance to recognizing Red China just to end the war in Indo-China. Not that they approve of Washington's intransigence concerning Mao. His *de facto* recognition is inevitable in the long run, they say, and it is unwise to resist unduly the inevitable.

Although the French have cried "wolf" frequently since the Liberation with a view to extracting aid from the United States, it would be a mistake, I believe, to take too lightly the fears they voice at present. The failure of the Geneva Conference to produce peace in Indo-China might well result in the collapse of the pro-Western conservative regime in France and its replacement by the neutralists, who would end the war at any cost and delay the ratification of EDC indefinitely.

No wonder, then, that quite a few astute French politicians consider the Geneva Conference as a trap, designed to swallow up the Atlantic Alliance, and as a device to delay and kill the European army plan. They argue that while there might be a ghost of a chance for peace in direct negotiations with the exhausted Ho Chi Minh, it was sheer madness to expect peace from Molotov. Why, they argue, should Molotov wish to facilitate the ratification of EDC by making peace in Indo-China? It just isn't his way of doing things, they say, and they fear that Bidault made a fatal mistake in letting the West in for the conference.

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THE Freeman

A Fortnightly
For
Individualists

Executive Director KURT LASSEN
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Contents VOL. 4, NO. 15 APRIL 19, 1954

Editorials

The Fortnight	509
Nuclear Assumptions	510
New York's Dock Strike	511
The Ever-Candid "Friend"	512
Academic Conformists	513

Articles

A Plan for Molotov	FREDA UTLEY 514
How We Helped Ho Chi Minh	HILAIRE DU BERRIER 516
Letter from Paris	R. G. WALDECK 518
What Kind of Tax Reduction?	HARLEY L. LUTZ 519
Rules for Redbaiting	M. K. ARGUS 522
And Now, the Big Truth	ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON 523
Poland's Hand in Our Pocket	J. A. SAM 526
The "Equal Time" Problem	JAMES LAWRENCE FLY 527
Letter from Spain	JAMES BURNHAM 529
A Second Look	EUGENE LYONS 531

Books and the Arts

Facts and Logic re McCarthy	MAX EASTMAN 532
Investigation Justified	ROBERT MORRIS 534
The Function of Money	BETTINA BIEN 535
The Too Modest Manner	HELEN WOODWARD 535
Civilization's Chances	JAMES RORTY 536
Book Marks	536
The Free Man's Library	HENRY HAZLITT 537

Poems

In Time of Intimidation	WITTER BYNNER 529
Night Song	EMMA GRAY TRIGG 530

This Is What They Said

From Our Readers

Among Ourselves

The FREEMAN considers the forthcoming conference at Geneva of an importance ranking with Munich and Yalta, perhaps transcending both. In order that our readers might have background information on some of the major issues to be discussed there, we are devoting more space than usual to this event. First there is FREDA UTLEY's evaluation (p. 514) of what transpired at Berlin and what she foresees for Geneva. Miss Utley is author of one of the most authoritative books on the Far East published in recent years (*The China Story*) and is well acquainted by study and experience with the aims and purposes both of the Chinese Communists and their Soviet backers. A report from the COUNTESS WALDECK in Paris (p. 518) tells what M. Bidault hopes to gain at Geneva and why he is wrong. Our third story, by HILAIRE DU BERRIER (p. 516), focuses geographically and politically on the major subject on the conference agenda—Indo-China—and gives some hitherto suppressed facts about why American aid to the "liberator" Ho Chi Minh is today costing American taxpayers millions of dollars to combat Communist aggression. Mr. du Berrier spent ten years (1937-47) in China and Indo-China, three of them in a Japanese prison camp. He was employed by OSS in Shanghai for a time after the war.

On the domestic front HARLEY L. LUTZ, renowned tax expert, gives some hard-headed and practical-minded answers (p. 519) to a question much in our minds—can taxes be reduced and if so how? Dr. Lutz has been living with the unhappy subject of taxation for over thirty years, has written a score of books and innumerable articles about it.

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON has long been a champion of good government and of America's basic freedoms regardless of the political party in power. To this end he has examined the Democratic and Republican ledgers over the past fifty years and come up with some conclusions that cannot fail to impress both parties (p. 523). During World War Two he served as Brigadier General in the Ordnance Corps and as vice chairman of the War Production Board. He is chairman of the board of directors of Johnson & Johnson.

The recent furore about time on the air, involving Edward R. Murrow, Senator McCarthy, Adlai Stevenson, the Republican Party, Fulton Lewis, Jr. *et al*, gave rise to various technical questions that were unresolvable without consulting an indisputable authority. We found him in the person of JAMES LAWRENCE FLY, a soft-spoken, gentle-mannered Texan, who was for five years (1939-44) Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, is now a director of the American Civil Liberties Union and a practicing lawyer in New York City.

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